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H PASS TO CODEL MCCAIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/30/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IS](#) [OVIP](#)
SUBJECT: CORRECTED COPY: LIVNI MEETS MCCAIN, DISCUSSES
GROWING HAMAS SUPPORT, DANGEROUS QUIET IN GAZA

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RICHARD H. JONES FOR REASONS 1.
4 (B) AND (D).

11. (U) This cable replaces Tel Aviv 732. Please see
correction in paragraph 8.

12. (C) Summary. On March 19, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi
Livni met with U.S. Senators John McCain, Joseph Lieberman,
and Lindsey Graham. Their discussion centered on the growing
public support for Hamas, and the challenges posed by the
Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, which has continued to
quietly fortify its missiles and rockets capabilities.
Senator McCain also briefed Livni on Iraq and requested that
Israel reopen its embassy in Baghdad before the U.S.
presidential elections. End Summary.

GROWING SUPPORT FOR HAMAS

13. (C) In a 19 March meeting, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi
Livni and U.S. Senators John McCain, Joseph Lieberman, and
Lindsey Graham discussed the growing support for Hamas both
in the Gaza Strip and now also in the West Bank.
Livni cited statistics published earlier in the week
indicating that if elections were held in the West Bank
immediately, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh would overturn
President Mahmoud Abbas. She noted that this is a new shift
in public opinion, which merits some concern. Livni
characterized the Fatah/Hamas rivalry as a zero-sum game and
lamented that Fatah has not positioned itself to be a real
alternative to Hamas. She pointed specifically to conflicts
between Salam Fayyad and Fatah over the structure of the
government, and the frailty of public opinion to withstand
false perceptions of victory generated by Hamas. Livni
offered the example of a Hamas "declaration of victory"
several days earlier following Israel's withdrawal of tanks
upon completing a brief mission in Gaza. She noted that
Fayyad is "smart, clean" but that it is very difficult for
him to create a better security situation on the ground in
the West Bank than exists in Gaza.

14. (C) Livni recalled that she had tried to stop Hamas from
participating in elections, and that she researched the
constitutions and electoral laws of many other countries. She
noted that in Europe, a party cannot participate in elections
if it supports violence. "Elected parties supporting
violence is the threat to pragmatic leadership in the
region," Livni argued, noting that this was Europe's lesson
learned after World War II. She argued that "democracy has a
right to defend itself from those who would threaten it from
the inside."

CHALLENGING QUIET IN GAZA

15. (C) Addressing the issue of Gaza, Livni suggested that the greatest problem in recent weeks is that on the surface Gaza appears to be calm, while in reality Hamas is quietly continuing to fortify missile and rocket armaments. She lamented that successful efforts to maintain calm and stability in Gaza have only conferred more legitimacy upon Hamas, which has stated that it will never make peace with Israel and is actively building its capabilities in order to raise a greater threat against Israel in the future.

16. (C) Livni asserted that any proposed answer to the situation in Gaza must provide three essential elements: 1) cessation of violence 2) reduction in smuggling, and 3) must not confer further legitimacy upon Hamas. She explained that the possibility of large scale military action in Gaza remains on the table. She added that a military incursion would not be ideal, because it would have the negative effect of generating more support for Hamas, but it would be effective in reducing the capability of Hamas military elements. Livni reflected that sometimes people think that Israeli military action is a cause of extremism, and pointed to the situation in Gaza as an example showing that it is exactly the opposite.

ANNAPOLIS

17. (C) Asked by Lieberman whether the Annapolis process would have a chance of producing any changes, Livni replied that she has invested a great deal of time and energy in the Annapolis process, and so "there is hope." But she immediately noted that Abbas has not made himself available

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to negotiate, pointing out that he "left for Africa two weeks ago and never came back." She added that the Palestinian leader is "too weak," and reminded the senators that when Israel made a small incursion into Gaza, he had immediately called off the negotiations. "I told him" Livni related, "when he does something like this, he makes it impossible for himself to come back to the table."

IRAQ

18. (C) McCain provided Livni a brief account of his visit to Iraq, noting the improving security situation, and stressing that he would like to see moderate Arab countries reopen their embassies in Baghdad and would like Israel deliver the same message to their moderate Arab neighbors. (NOTE: REFTEL reported that McCain requested Israel to reopen its embassy. This is not correct. Israel has never had diplomatic relations with Iraq. END NOTE.) McCain said that with the recent military success in Iraq, it is important to see progress also on the diplomatic side. Senator Graham added that reopening embassies in Iraq before the U.S. elections would help make the point to American voters that Iraq is really turning around. Livni did not offer a reaction to this point. McCain emphasized that the most important thing for Iraqis now is to have the chance to vote in provincial elections. Livni was somewhat skeptical on this point, as well, and replied that Israel and the U.S. cannot afford to have Iraqis misusing elections as in the case of the Palestinian election of Hamas, or the current deadlock in Lebanon.

19. (U) CODEL McCain has not cleared this message.

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JONES